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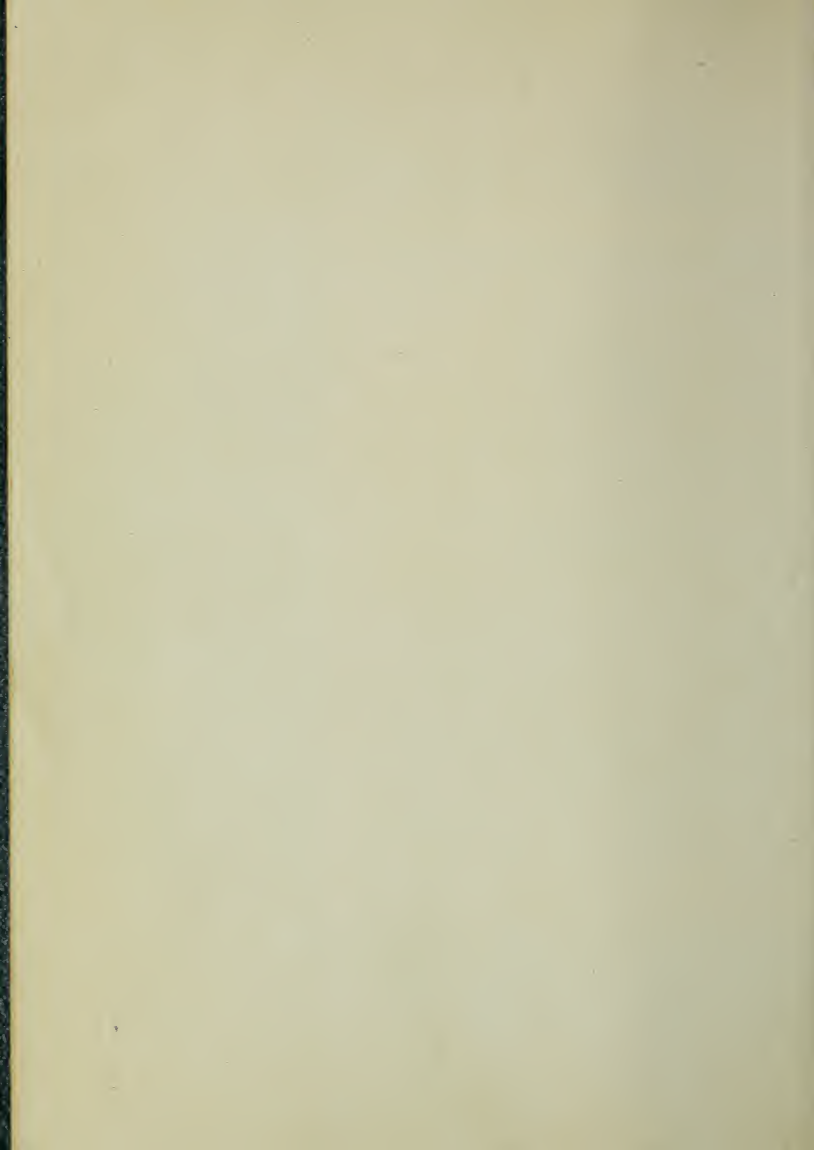
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THE LIFE WORK OF

# ADOLPH SUTRO

AN ADDRESS MADE TO THE  
P. T. A. AND  
PUPILS OF

SUTRO SCHOOL, SAN FRANCISCO

BY

**MRS. FRED. N. POSTEL (MAUDE)**

FIRST PRESIDENT OF  
SUTRO P. T. A.

APRIL 6, 1931

IN COMMEMORATION





# ADOLPH SUTRO

The life record of Adolph Sutro is the story of an empire builder. His indomitable perseverance, his unabating energy and his incomparable foresight, supplemented by financial genius and unchanging faith, enabled him to become one of the builders of California's fortunes as well as the promoter of his individual interests.

He was born in Aix-la-Chapelle, Rhenish Prussia, April 29, 1830. He was the son of a prosperous cloth manufacturer and in Germany pursued his education attending a polytechnic school, and afterward entered the employ of his father, and at his death, in 1847, took charge of the business which, however, was destroyed during the revolution of 1848. At the age of eighteen Mr. Sutro went to Memel in East Prussia and established a cloth factory there. In 1850 the family came to the United States. The year before an elder brother had come to this country, and acting upon his advice, Mrs. Sutro with six sons and four daughters sailed from Antwerp to America in August, 1850. The family had hardly landed in New York when the young immigrant, lured by all he heard and read of the glorious prospects of the new Eldorado, bade farewell to his mother, his brothers and sisters and, almost

without means, started by way of the Isthmus route for the scene of his future toil and successes, arriving in San Francisco on the 21st day of November, 1850. He at once engaged in mercantile pursuits and for a time was an importer of general merchandise but later turned his attention to the retail and wholesale cigar and tobacco business, his principal store being on Montgomery between Sacramento and California Streets. He continued in the business until 1859, when he was attracted to mining by the big strikes that were then being made in Nevada. He established a small metallurgical works in San Francisco and in 1860 went to Virginia City, Nevada. In 1861 he built a quartz mill at Dayton, Nevada, on the Carson river, and in that mill worked over the tailings of other mills, meeting with substantial success. At this time developments on the famous Comstock lode were being rapidly pushed and as the work progressed, great difficulty was being encountered in the various mines. Some of the mines at the lower levels were flooded with water to the depth of one hundred feet or more and had been abandoned. Others were unworkable on account of the excessive heat and noxious gases. It was Mr. Sutro who conceived the idea and planned the famous Sutro Tunnel, at that time the most stupendous mining engineering feats ever attempted and one that has been equalled in but a single instance to the present — a work which has made the name of Adolph Sutro famous throughout the world. This project, as conceived and ultimately completed by him, was the construction of a tunnel at a low level from the nearest point in the foothills of the Carson valley to the most central mine of the Comstock



group for the purpose not only of draining the entire Comstock lode but also to provide ventilation for the underground workings and to afford a cheaper means of handling the ore and waste rock than by individual shafts. The point in the valley selected was twenty thousand, four hundred and eighty-nine feet, nearly four miles, on a straight line from the shaft of the Savage mine, which was centrally located in the group. From this latter point lateral drifts were planned to cover the entire lode. For some distance from the mouth the main tunnel inside the timbers, is fourteen feet wide by ten feet high. For the rest of the distance it is seven and a half feet high, eight feet wide at the top. At the track rail on the bottom of the tunnel it is nine to nine and a half feet wide, with a drainage trench in the center, thus accomodating a double track, one on either side of the trench. It was to cut the Savage shaft at a depth of sixteen hundred and forty feet, with ample fall toward the Carson river to take care of the drainage. All of the plans down to the minutest details were completed in advance and a company was organized in Nevada to carry on the work. The first legislature of Nevada, on February 4, 1865, passed an act granting the company a franchise which gave them full protection and which provided that the actual work should begin within a year, and be completed in eight yeas. This was followed by procuring all necessary rights of way from individuals owning surface claims.

Formal contracts were then secured from nearly all the mining companies operating on the lode, by which the

tunnel company was to be paid a royalty of two dollars per ton on every ton of ore taken from the mines benefitted by the tunnel, also a certain amount per ton for all waste rock taken out, an amount for supplies taken in and for every person in their employ using the tunnel as a means of getting in or out. These contracts were highly satisfactory to all parties concerned and a campaign to raise the necessary funds for the construction was begun. In order to fully protect himself in the future and to force those mines which had refused to contract with him in the first place to come into the agreement, Mr. Sutro procured the passage of an act by Congress, July 25, 1866, which provided for a right of way through the public land cut by the tunnel; the right to purchase at a dollar and a quarter per acre, not to exceed two sections of public lands, at or near the mouth of the tunnel; the right to purchase at five dollars per acre any public mineral land cut, discovered or developed by the company, excepting the Comstock mines as already located; also providing in express terms that the owners of Comstock Mines, drained or benefitted, should hold all claims located by them in the future subject to the same terms already entered into between them and the Tunnel company. On January 25, 1867, the two houses of the Nevada legislature unanimously passed a joint memorial and resolution asking government aid in the construction of the Sutro Tunnel. In this resolution the legislature thanked Adolph Sutro for his great services in originating the plan of the Sutro Tunnel and urged upon all the necessity of helping in the work. In a short time Mr. Sutro received many pledges for the purchase of the stock

in the Tunnel Company. "Then it was" said Mr. Sutro, "that the Bank of California stepped in and concluded to break up the tunnel enterprise. They came to the conclusion that this was a great enterprise and, thinking we were about to get a subsidy from the United States, they set out to break it up". Up to this time all had been smooth sailing but now opposition was encountered from the moneyed powers that controlled the Comstock group. Many of the mines attempted to void their contracts; those which had pledged financial support withdrew their pledges and a bitter war was waged against the project and against Mr. Sutro personally. It was carried on through the press and into Congress, where an attempt was made to have his franchise revoked and every possible means was used to thwart his project. The subsidized press became very intense against Mr. Sutro, but, nothing daunted, although he had never made a speech in his life, "he made up his mind to get up in Virginia City, right in their midst, and show up their rascalities and explain the persecution they had instituted against him." He told the assembled people just what he intended to do and just how his tunnel would benefit the mines of the district and the state at large and just why he was being opposed by the moneyed interests, with the result that the agitation launched by the "interests" proved a boomerang. His appeal to the working men aroused their sympathy and the Miners' Union raised a fund of fifty thousand dollars and this, together with funds raised from the purchase of stock by a number of individuals and with other moneys

raised by Sutro from his own friends, helped to start the tunnel.

On October 19, 1869, a beginning was made on the actual construction. In 1871 a number of English capitalists purchased a million and a half of stock and from that time forward the work was pushed as rapidly as possible. The opposition of the bank ring, however, continued and it tried by every means in its power to have repealed in Washington the rights of the Sutro Tunnel Company. Mr. Sutro then again took the lecture platform and began a speaking campaign at Washington. Among his hearers were senators, congressmen, scientific men from the various government bureaus and, chief of all, the president, General Grant, who with some of his cabinet was a most attentive listener. He repeated his lecture several times in Washington and, after his return to the coast, he lectured in many cities in Nevada and later in San Francisco and other California towns. Wherever he spoke the subsidized papers attacked him violently but everywhere the people received him cordially and in San Francisco, after the third lecture, he had to get a larger hall in order to accommodate the crowds who came to hear him. Meantime, although the work on the tunnel progressed rather slowly at first, with the advent of improved machinery, some of it especially designed, the work was carried on more rapidly as time passed by. As originally planned, four vertical shafts, the deepest one thousand four hundred and eightyfive feet, were to be sunk along the line of the tunnel from which the work of driving the tunnel proper

could be carried on both ways from each shaft. Two of these shafts, however, had to be abandoned on account of the constant influx of water, but the two nearest the tunnel were completed, the first in 1873, the second in 1874. As soon as each was finished drifts were started east and west from it and in due time accurate connections were made with the main tunnel. The work met with the greatest natural difficulties. In 1873 the temperature at the face of the tunnel was only seventy-two degrees Fahrenheit. It mounted to eighty-three degrees the next year, to ninety degrees in 1876, to ninety-six degrees in January, 1878, and to one hundred and nine degrees in April, and it grew worse until the surface of the rock showed a temperature of one hundred and fourteen degrees. Men could work in the tunnel but a few hours at a time, not only because of the heat, but on account of the gases. Again and again they were overcome and carried out. The indomitable energy of Mr. Sutro showed itself here, there and everywhere. He stripped to the waist and took his stand with his men and by his strength and example kept them going. It seemed that it would be impossible to complete the work under such conditions, but he kept everlastingly at it, for the tunnel was then approaching its goal. Finally the men at work in the Savage mine could hear the blasts in the tunnel and then the blows of the power drills worked day and night. Mr. Sutro kept at it and on the 8th of July, 1878, with his own hand, he placed the last blast and opened a hole into the Savage shaft through which he was the first man to crawl. When this contact was made, sixteen hundred and forty feet below the surface of the mine.



the temperature, which had previously stood at one hundred and twenty degrees, fell at once to below ninety degrees.

The mines on the Comstock at first refused to use the tunnel under the terms of the contracts originally entered into, but they soon realized that they were losing money by maintaining their own pumping plants. New contracts were entered into, the drainage capacity of the tunnel was increased and in a few years water was flowing through it at the rate of billions of gallons annually. The lateral drifts were subsequently bored and when completed the total length of the main bore and laterals was thirty-three thousand, three hundred and fifteen feet or about six and a third miles. The cost of the main tunnel was three and a half million dollars and the total cost, including laterals, etc. was about five million. While building the Sutro tunnel Mr. Sutro introduced many of the then most modern mining machinery into use on the Pacific Coast.

After the tunnel victory was won Mr. Sutro sold out his stock for about a million dollars and left Nevada for San Francisco, where he gave attention to real estate. He was unwavering in his belief in the future commercial greatness of the city and carried on his real-estate operations with the same daring in the face of adverse advice as had characterized his Sutro tunnel project. At that time the eastern end of Golden Gate Park was beyond the western limits of the city streets but he began buying lands in the neighborhood of the park in the outside land which

were then acreage properties. He bought part of the San Miguel Rancho and lands in the vicinity comprising over one thousand acres, planting the sand dunes and sage-covered hills with trees. This property has grown into what is now the magnificent Sutro Forest. The hill which faces Golden Gate Park he called "Mount Parnassus". It has since been named in his honor, "Mount Sutro". He introduced the Bermuda or bent grass into California which is now used all over the coast for holding the sand dunes. He bought the land on which now stands the Cliff House, the Sutro Baths and the Sutro Gardens, known as Sutro Heights, and many acres in their vicinity fronting on the ocean. He added and added thereto until his real-estate holdings amounted to one-tenth of the acreage of San Francisco city and country. He was laughed at for buying these barren sand hills and his immense holdings were referred to as "Sutro's Folly". As the city grew and the cable lines were pushed westward his property began coming into the market as building lots and his harvest was a rich one. For his own residence he rehabilitated the old country house on Sutro Heights and laid out the grounds on the high bluff overlooking the ocean into magnificent gardens which he threw open to the public and from that day to the present Sutro Heights has been one of the beauty spots of San Francisco. He entertained many schools and children there and gave up the grounds on many occasions for charitable purposes. He was a generous supporter of the kindergartens. He was very fond of children and could entertain them by the hour with original and fantastic stories which he made up as he went

along and to which he added in response to their demand for more.

He was an advocate for education and having a great many men working for him who had families, he conceived the idea that the children should go to school. As there were no schools near, he built a one-story building in the sand dunes, on Point Lobos Avenue, between 21st and 22nd Avenues, and opened this school in the fall of 1884. This was the first school in the Richmond district and was called the Sutro School. Mr. Sutro employed and paid the first teacher who instructed in this school.

He also rebuilt the famous Cliff House and in 1885 began excavating the site for the construction of the enormous and magnificent Sutro Baths which, on completion, represented a cost of nearly a million dollars and are the most complete of the kind the world has ever seen. These baths have immense tanks of ever changing salt water of various temperatures. The manner of filling the Sutro Baths is extremely ingenious. M. Sutro blasted a basin out of the solid rock more than fifty feet in width and eighteen feet above the low water mark. The ocean waves dash over the top and fill the basin and the water is then conducted from it to the tanks in Sutro Baths. The baths are surrounded by numberless dressing rooms and tiers of seats for thousands of spectators. Between the tiers were built greant staircases which were flanked by terraces of the rarest and most beautiful plants. Along the sides were arranged long galleries of paintings, sculp-



ture, tapestries and cabinets containing Aztec, Mexican, North American, Egyptian, Syrian, Japanese, Chinese and other curios. A part was also devoted to a museum representing all the range of natural history. It contained specimens of animals from every clime, collections of birds nests, eggs, fishes and shells, the whole being covered with a high and airy framework of a steel-arched roof of tinted glass. Mr. Sutro imported from Europe copies of famous statues with which he adorned Sutro Heights, at a time when few works of art existed in San Francisco. He also erected the Statute of Liberty on Mount Olympus and gave it with a plot of land one hundred feet square to the city.

At the time that these attractions were in the height of their popularity two of the city railways had steam road extensions to the ocean and on holidays carried thousands of people to the Cliff House, the Gardens and the Baths. A fare of twenty cents was charged for the round trip, much to the displeasure of Mr. Sutro, who contended for a single fare. The roads refused to grant this concession and in retaliation he fenced in the various attraction in the neighborhood of the Cliff House and charged an admittance fee to all those who came out over the railroads, with the result that the number of passengers carried by the railroads was reduced by seventy five per cent. Mr. Sutro planned and built the Scenic Railroad skirting the Cliffs along the Golden Gate. He tried to introduce electric power to run the cars but after a thorough investigation of the subject in the United States and Europe found that

this motive power could not yet be used practically. This was in 1883.

In the mayoralty campaign of 1894 there were four tickets in the field and Mr. Sutro was chosen to head the populist ticket. His candidacy at the head of this ticket was considered rather in the light of a joke, but he entered into the campaign with the same vigor which had characterized his leadership in other « forlorn hopes » and, making his fight against the railroads the keynote of his campaign, soon forced the opposition to realize that he was to be seriously reckoned with. At the last moment the railroads, in an effort to cripple him, reduced the fare from the bay to the ocean to five cents, but regardless of this Mr. Sutro was elected by a majority of all the votes cast. During his term of office he waged a war against the corporate interest of the city, especially against the street railways. At the expiration of his term of office in 1897 he withdrew altogether from public affairs and devoted his time to his personal interests, which had fallen into rather a chaotic condition. The strain, however, had been too much for even his robust constitution. He became ill and died a year and a half after his retirement from office. Mr. Sutro was a handsome man, of striking personal appearance. He had a magnetic personality. He was a brilliant conversationalist and what he said was not only interesting but instructive as well. He had a scientific mind and great mechanical ingenuity. He spoke French, German and English fluently and had a speaking knowledge of several other modern languages.

It was not alone during his mayoralty service that Mr. Sutro was able to accomplish much for the public welfare. In Nevada he started a new party, the Independent, in 1874. The platform and resolutions of the Independent convention, held at Carson September 3, 1874, have become the watchword of every honest party throughout the land and are the principals that the people are fighting for today to regain their share of the government. In this way he acted as a pioneer in clearing the road for the greatest campaign of modern times — a campaign against the corruption of government by corporate powers and for "equal justice to all".

It was also while he was in Nevada that he irrigated the desert land with water from the tunnel and caused trees, plants and vegetable gardens to grow in this previously arid ground. This was the forerunner of the great government irrigation reclamation scheme which has since been carried out in Nevada and elsewhere. In his fight against the bank ring he commenced the anti-graft fight, which has grown into a national struggle. San Francisco as well as the state is directly indebted to him in many ways. He helped in the building of the great highway and the speed track. He gave the trees which were planted on Goat Island and advocated Arbor Day. He fought the Spring Valley Water Company and helped protect the purity of the water supply by starting the removal of the hog and dairy ranches and so preventing the sawage from getting into it. He was instrumental in having the Seal Rock law passed, thus saving one of the sights of San

Francisco. He advocated removing Golden Gate cemetery and turning it into a park. He started the movement for a boulevard from Fort Mason along the coast line to the Presidio, then through it along the shorelands of the Golden Gate to the Cliff House and Park. He was the original projector of the Twin Peaks tunnel. He started, carried on and eventually was the chief factor in winning the anti-funding fight against the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad, thus saving for the people, it is said, upwards of one hundred million dollars. Mr. Sutro married in 1855. His wife who died in 1893 left six children two sons Charles W. and Edgar Sutro, and four daughters, Emma Laura who married Dr. George W. Merritt; Rosa V. the wife of Pio Alberto Morbio, Kate the wife of Prof. Moritz Nussbaum of Bonn, Germany and Clara the Countess de Choiseul.

The death of Mr. Sutro occurred August 8, 1898. What he did for San Francisco cannot be overestimated. He called to the city the attention of the world. Every tourist to the coast is familiar with the Cliff House, Sutro Baths, Sutro Heights and other attractions which he instituted. The original Cliff House was destroyed by fire in 1894 and was replaced by the magnificent structure which marked the site until September 7, 1907, when it also was burned to the ground. This in turn has been replaced by the present building. Another of his projects which worked untold good for the city as well as to advance his private interests was the building of the Sutro Railroad which, primarily planned for the development

of his real-estate holdings, gave him, through independent connections, a line from the ferry to the seashore.

Mr. Sutro collected one of the finest libraries in the city which at the time of his death was the fourth largest and most valuable in the United States, either private or public. As a nucleus for this library he visited Europe and purchased the most valuable works of the Sunderland or Blenheim library, of the libraries of the Duke of Hamilton, of the Monastery of Buxheim, and of the Duke of Dahlberg, which were sold at auction at that time. From the Royal State Library at Munich, which had absorbed the collections of the confiscated monasteries of Bavaria, he bought more than four thousand incunabula, probably the best collection in existence. The library also contained a rare lot of works on the Mexican war of independence, twenty-three hundred Japanese manuscripts, rare collections in Semitic philology and thousands of volumes of scientific and technical character — a total collection of more than two hundred thousand volumes. A very valuable portion of this library was destroyed in the disaster of 1906.

Mr. Sutro was a very charitable man, giving to all worthy causes, his largest single donation being thirteen acres within the City limits for a site for the Affiliated College of the University of California. He was a great friend of the working man and a champion of their rights. There was no one too humble or lowly to claim his considerate attention. He gave temporary work to many needy

persons, and he was a very much beloved man by all of his employees. Mr. Sutro was an earnest advocate of woman's suffrage. The life record of Adolph Sutro needs no comment. He possessed initiative far beyond that of the great majority; his insight enabled him to see where others saw not; his ability to coordinate forces enabled him to see where others could not and to plan and perform where others believed that no opportunity existed. His indomitable energy carried him steadily forward and his purposes found their justification in the splendid results which he accomplished. The world and San Francisco in particular owe to him a debt of gratitude which can never be repaid. He was a bigger man than his age, infinitely bigger than his critics, but in the perspective of the years he will stand out as one of the most eminent of those who have figured in California's development.





